

A guide to sedation for parents and carers

Patient information

This information sheet explains what sedation is and how this medicine is used during procedures. Please ask a doctor or nurse if you have any questions.

What is sedation?

Sedation is a type of medicine which helps children feel calm and possibly sleepy. This medicine can help children if they are worried or need to stay still for procedures. Sedation does not make children go to sleep. Sedation can be given in different ways – breathed in, taken by mouth, or by nose.

We try to carry out procedures without using sedation when possible. If sedation is needed for a procedure, we always discuss it with parents and carers first.

If children need sedation our play team of qualified health play specialists and play assistants are available to help. They are specially trained to use play to help children cope with any distressing experiences in hospital.

Two important facts about sedation

- Children may not remember having a procedure when sedation is used.
- Sedation is different from a general anaesthetic (where patients are asleep).

Types of sedation

We use two types of sedation:

1. Nitrous oxide gas (Entonox) – suitable for children around 5 years old and up. Nitrous oxide gas can make children sleepy and provides pain relief.

Children breathe the gas in through a mouthpiece. The gas works quickly and wears off quickly.

2. Midazolam – suitable for children around the age of 1 and up. Midazolam can make children calm and sleepy but does not provide pain relief. Children may need pain relief as well as midazolam.

Some children may appear to have more energy instead of being relaxed after they have midazolam. If this happens, different medicine may be needed, or a procedure may need to be rescheduled.

Fasting (not eating) before sedation

Sedation can make children feel sick or be sick (vomit). Children may have to fast (stop eating) for up to 2 to 6 hours before being sedated. This reduces the chance of being sick (vomiting) when sedation is given.

Children can drink water until the time a procedure is scheduled to take place.

Staff explain to parents and carers how long children need to fast. It is important not to give children anything to eat or drink (other than water) while they are fasting.

Procedures are delayed or even cancelled if children are given something to eat or drink (other than water) before being sedated.

Before your child has a procedure

A doctor or nurse will assess your child before each procedure. Following the assessment, the doctor or nurse will discuss the type of sedation your child will have for the procedure.

Before each procedure, make sure you tell your doctor or nurse about any allergies or previous problems your child or family members have had with anaesthetics or sedation.

As a parent or carer, you need to give consent (permission) before we give your child sedation. You need to understand the reasons for sedation and the risks involved. If you have any concerns and questions, please ask us.

Please note: a doctor or nurse has to insert a cannula (a small plastic tube) into one of your child's veins before sedation is given. The cannula is put in place to enable us to give emergency medicine quickly if your child has a reaction to sedation, becomes too sleepy, for example.

Members of our play team are available to help:

- prepare your child for procedures
- your child understand what will happen
- distract your child's attention while procedures are happening

During a procedure

During a procedure staff check your child's breathing. They use a small device called a pulse oximeter placed on your child's finger or toe. The pulse oximeter measures the oxygen level (oxygen saturation) of blood in the body.

All medical procedures carry some risk. Sometimes there are complications during procedures.

For example, your child may feel sick, become too sleepy and need extra oxygen through a mask or breathing tube. Or sedation may not work properly, and extra medicine or treatment is needed.

Very rarely, your child may breathe sick (vomit) into the lungs (aspiration) while sedated. Staff will treat your child if this happens.

After a procedure

After a procedure, we will monitor your child's heart rate (pulse) and oxygen level until he or she is fully awake.

Your child may feel drowsy, confused, irritable or be more clumsy than usual after a procedure. This is normal for up to 4 hours after a procedure.

After a procedure, your child will have:

- a pulse oximeter attached to a finger or toe which measures the oxygen level (oxygen saturation) of blood in the body
- a blood pressure cuff placed around an upper arm or lower leg. The cuff is linked to a device that measures blood pressure – the strength with which blood flows around the body

It is important that your child stays in bed until a doctor or nurse says it is okay to:

- move about
- eat and drink

Before going home it is very important that your child:

- is fully awake
- can walk unaided (and does usually)
- has something to eat and drink without being sick (vomiting)
- and had a pee

The cannula is then removed. Your child will usually be able to go home around 4 hours after a procedure.

Care at home

When you get home:

- keep a close eye on your child
- supervise all play and bathing for 24 hours
- do not let your child swim or use play equipment (bikes or monkey bars, for example) that may cause an accident

Get medical help

Phone 111 if your child is:

- sick (vomits) more than twice
- drowsy, dizzy or feels generally unwell

Phone 999 and ask for an ambulance immediately if your child:

- cannot sit or walk (and does usually)
- is having breathing problems
- will not wake up

Useful contacts

Rose ward

Phone: 0330 128 2411 or 2412 (ask to speak to the nurse in charge)

Paediatric bed management team

Phone: 0330 128 858

If you need help or advice about any service or department at our hospitals, and feel unable to talk to those people responsible for your care, call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 020 7349 7715 or email pals@rbht.nhs.uk. This is a confidential service.
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